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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9600  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3295  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4309  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6695  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0283  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000543

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [APER](#) [BM](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: ANOTHER CHAT WITH BURMA'S DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: A. A) RANGOON 287

[1](#)B. B) RANGOON 249

Classified By: CDA Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Charge met with Deputy Foreign Minister Kyaw Thu on April 25 to continue discussions in the hope of gathering more insights into the opaque regime. He did not disappoint. We discussed a range of issues from his recent trip to China to obtaining multiple entry visas for regional officers to the need for peaceful change. He provided some useful advice to keep in mind as we try to expand our American Center programs to Mandalay, as well as an update on life in Pyinmana. End Summary

#### Lessons for Mandalay

[1](#)2. (C) Charge mentioned that we wanted to make greater use of our property in Mandalay, for instance by opening a library since many Burmese expressed such an interest. Kyaw Thu smiled when told how our recent visit there appeared to irritate the Mandalay military commander (ref A). He suggested that we consider donating books instead, and recounted two stories as lessons. He himself wanted to open a small bookstall/lending library with donated books from friends abroad and had asked the Information Minister about getting this started. Although the Minister seemed to approve the idea, he told Kyaw Thu that he would have to pay the customs duties in dollars and they would be considerable because they are calculated by weight. Kyaw Thu concluded that he might pursue the idea after he retires.

[1](#)3. (C) Kyaw Thu also recounted the experience of the German Ambassador trying to open a cultural center here. The German Ambassador grew impatient at Kyaw Thu's waiting for a propitious time to raise the subject, so went to the Foreign Minister directly. Since the Minister rarely offers his own opinion to higher ups, according to Kyaw Thu unlike himself, the Minister sought the approval of the senior generals and did not get it because of concerns that people might be exposed to "propaganda about Germany." Once the generals say no, then "nothing can be done," Kyaw Thu said, so now the idea is dead. Charge suggested we might use the Mandalay property for computer classes. Kyaw Thu agreed that might be doable, if the computers were not hooked up to the internet.

## Peaceful Transition

14. (C) Charge noted how hungry Burmese were for more information. Kyaw Thu agreed and added that the situation is more open now, than during the Ne Win period. He noted that imported magazines, such as Time, with articles critical of the military can be found now. While bookstores now have more variety, he continued, they still have a lot of books on SPDC building projects rather than subjects people want to read. The Foreign Ministry has greater access than most to books, but even its libraries are limited. Charge observed that making more information available to the people could pave the way for a more peaceful transition. Kyaw Thu nodded when she added that there were probably many people in the Foreign Ministry and throughout the government that recognized the need for a peaceful transition. He continued to nod in apparent agreement that change was inevitable and could not be denied. A gradual opening could permit a peaceful transition, but continued resistance might result in violence. Kyaw Thu finally spoke, "Like in 88." Charge reiterated that we wanted to see a peaceful transition and assumed that most Burmese wanted the same, which Kyaw Thu acknowledged with more nods.

## Negotiating with the Chinese

15. (C) Kyaw Thu returned April 22 from Kunming where he had been trying to resolve the cases of 580 Chinese detained in Burma for illegal logging. He met with Beijing and Yunnan officials, and was accompanied by GOB Forestry and Mining officials. He seemed proud that he brought the two sides together, noting that the Chinese had been trying to meet for several months directly with the two ministries without ever

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receiving a response. He also claimed credit for resolving the dispute with Burma agreeing to free 536 Chinese over time. The remaining 44 are in Burmese prisons on drug charges, he said, and the Chinese "do not want them back." Charge asked if he thought the Chinese were serious about stopping illegal logging. Kyaw Thu replied that the PRC had sealed the border to imports; the problem was on the Burmese side of the border. Charge noted she had seen pictures of trucks piled with logs headed for the border, so they had to cross the border somehow.

## Pyinmana Update

16. (C) Kyaw Thu urged the United States to at least reserve a plot of land in the new capital before all the good parcels go. Hinting at a willingness to accommodate, he noted that some Embassies, like the Chinese, might need more than the allotted 5 acres, so 10 acre plots would also be available, but nothing in between. Charge asked why the diplomats had not yet been invited to visit, since most people would not commit sight unseen. Kyaw Thu said he "could have predicted" that the visit would not happen as promised in April because construction is still ongoing. He said that the current condition would not give a good impression and then the diplomats would report this back to their capitals. He said the Thai had agreed to reserve a lot, even though they are building a new Embassy in Rangoon. It may be a long time before anyone builds anything, he acknowledged, but only by reserving a plot now can a country be sure of having a prime spot.

17. (C) Personal life has improved for Kyaw Thu in Pyinmana since his wife now lives with him in his office. "Can't you see that I'm getting fatter now that my wife is cooking for me again." He said they erected a partition in his "very large" office to make a sleeping area. Housing for deputy ministers is still under construction, and he does not intend to move in until all the construction is finished. Asked about working conditions, he said that he now has plenty of time to read because there is no one to meet with. Sudden requests for information can be a problem, because often the

desk officer is in Rangoon and must be called back to the new capital. He has back-to-back meetings with various Ambassadors when he comes to Rangoon. He noted that arranging the above meeting in Kunming had been difficult, because he could only talk to the Chinese Ambassador by phone, "which is not a good idea." He said now that hotels had been built, some diplomats will be invited individually, citing as an example an upcoming Russian delegation.

#### Multiple Entry Visas

18. (C) Charge asked Kyaw Thu about the possibility of obtaining multiple entry visas for regional USG personnel assigned elsewhere. We noticed that the already prolonged visa process had become even longer after the GOB move to Pyinmana. He indicated that he could assist, if not too many. Charge said 20-30 multiple entry visas would be helpful. He countered that eight in priority order might be manageable and that we could submit more names later. He said that we should send the request to him directly, so he could "send forward when the mood is right." He cautioned against involving the consular division directly since then the request would pass up to the other Deputy Minister, who he intimidated, was much less friendly towards us.

#### Comment

19. (C) Kyaw Thu seemed much more content in comparison to previous meetings (ref B), which probably is a tribute to his wife. He also came across as smug, verging on cocky, about his ability to get things done, yet offered some practical advice. We had already decided against seeking approval directly to set up an American Center in Mandalay to avoid a no. This is a culture where working around obstacles is the best way to achieve results. Although he talked a lot about books and his reading, he did not take Charge up on repeated offers to provide him books, so he has set limits on this

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relationship. Similarly his bravado in speaking out disappears when talking about a political transition. He does seem genuinely interested in showing what he can do, so we might as well see whether that can advance our objectives.

VILLAROSA